

House Armed Services Committee

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DEMOCRATS

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House Armed Services Committee Supports House Passage of Fiscal Year 2005 Defense Authorization Bill

WASHINGTON D.C. May 21—Democrats in the House yesterday presented a motion during consideration of the Defense Authorization bill that would have promoted two important ideas—outrage at the prison situation in Iraq and commitment to do something about it.

The Democratic motion was defeated on the floor of the House of Representatives in a 202-224, mostly party line vote. It would have called for the creation of a Select Committee, comprised of 10 members of Congress, to thoroughly investigate the occurrences within the U.S. detainee system. This is not meant to replace investigations by an independent panel or the Administration. Rather, it is simply meant to exercise the Constitutional responsibility of the U.S. Congress to oversee the Department of Defense.

The U.S. Constitution explicitly creates a government under a strict set of checks and balances; a system where no one branch of government is given sole authority over any segment of society—including the military. In this system, Congress is specifically designated the role of oversight of the Executive Branch, including the U.S. military.

Revelations of the past few months regarding the horrendous abuses that occurred in the U.S. prison system in Iraq have opened our eyes to the dark side of human nature. As additional incidents have come to light, it appears that the problem is more widespread than originally thought. With the worsening of the situation comes the slow derailment of U.S. efforts in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. The very hearts and minds that Americans have shed blood to win are being turned against us, and without immediate, decisive action, the situation will continue to decline.

Something with such a broad impact as this situation is currently having, is deserving of the full weight of a Congressional investigation ensuring that those responsible, regardless of rank, are brought to justice, and that preventive measures are put in place to ensure it is unlikely to happen again.

If we lose the hearts and minds of the people in the Arab world, then all the hard work and sacrifice still being made by hundreds of thousands of U.S. military personnel will have been in vain. The least we can do as the governing body charged with oversight of the military, is to ensure that the truth is heard and our honorable service men and women can go back to the business of defending our nation.

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